

The Lord Is My Light

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In this Easter season we reflect upon and rejoice in the redemption provided by our Savior, Jesus Christ.¹

The clamor that reverberates across the earth because of worldly wickedness creates feelings of vulnerability. With modern communication the impact of iniquity, inequality, and injustice leaves many feeling that life is inherently unfair. As significant as these trials can be, they must not distract us from rejoicing in and celebrating Christ's supernal intercession in our behalf. The Savior literally "gained the victory over death." With mercy and compassion He took upon Himself our iniquity and transgressions, thus redeeming us and satisfying the demands of justice for all who would repent and believe on His name.²

His magnificent atoning sacrifice is of transcendent significance beyond mortal comprehension. This act of grace provides the peace that surpasses understanding.³

How, then, do we deal with the harsh realities that surround us?



My wife, Mary, has always loved sunflowers. She rejoices when they, in quite improbable places, appear on the roadside. There is a dirt road that leads to the home where my grandparents lived. When we started down that road, Mary would often exclaim, "Do you think we will see those amazing sunflowers today?" We were surprised that sunflowers flourish in soil which has been impacted by farm and snow removal equipment and the accumulation of materials that would not be considered ideal soil for wildflowers to grow.



One of the remarkable characteristics of young wild sunflowers, in addition to growing in soil that is not hospitable, is how the young flower bud follows the sun across the sky. In doing so, it receives life-sustaining energy before bursting forth in its glorious yellow color.

Like the young sunflower, when we follow the Savior of the world, the Son of God, we flourish and become glorious despite the many terrible circumstances that surround us. He truly is our light and life.

In the parable of the wheat and the tares, the Savior declared to His disciples that those who offend and do iniquity shall be gathered *out* of His kingdom.⁴ But speaking of the faithful, He said, “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”⁵ As individuals, disciples of Christ, living in a hostile world that is literally in commotion, we can thrive and bloom if we are rooted in our love of the Savior and humbly follow His teachings.

Our ability to stand firm and true and follow the Savior despite the vicissitudes of life is greatly strengthened by righteous families and Christ-centered unity in our wards and branches.⁶

The Right Time at Home

The role of the family in God’s plan is “to bring us happiness, to help us learn correct principles in a loving atmosphere, and to prepare us for eternal life.”⁷ The beautiful traditions of religious observance in the home need to be embedded in the hearts of our children.

My uncle Vaughn Roberts Kimball was a good student, an aspiring author, and a BYU football quarterback. On December 8, 1941, the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy. While on a recruiting assignment in Albany, New York, he submitted a short article to the *Reader’s Digest*. The magazine paid him \$200 and published his piece, titled “The Right Time at Home,” in the May 1944 issue.

His contribution to the *Reader’s Digest*, where he casts himself as the sailor, reads in part:

“The Right Time at Home:

“One evening in Albany, New York, I asked a sailor what time it was. He pulled out a huge watch and replied, ‘It’s 7:20.’ I knew it was later. ‘Your watch has stopped, hasn’t it?’ I asked.

“No,’ he said, ‘I’m still on Mountain Standard Time. I’m from southern Utah. When I joined the Navy, Pa gave me

this watch. He said it'd help me remember home.

“When my watch says 5 a.m. I know Dad is rollin’ out to milk the cows. And any night when it says 7:30 I know the whole family’s around a well-spread table, and Dad’s thankin’ God for what’s on it and askin’ Him to watch over me ... ,’ he concluded. ‘I can find out what time it is where I am easy enough. What I want to know is what time it is in Utah.’”⁸

Soon after submitting the article, Vaughn was assigned to sea duty in the Pacific theater. On May 11, 1945, while he was serving on the carrier USS *Bunker Hill* near Okinawa, the ship was bombed by two suicide planes.⁹ Almost 400 crewmen died, including my uncle Vaughn.

Elder Spencer W. Kimball extended his heartfelt sympathy to Vaughn’s father, noting Vaughn’s worthiness and the Lord’s assurance that “those that die in me shall not taste of death, for it shall be sweet unto them.”¹⁰ Vaughn’s father tenderly said that even though Vaughn was buried at sea, the hand of God would take Vaughn to his heavenly home.¹¹

Twenty-eight years later, President Spencer W. Kimball spoke of Vaughn in general conference. He said, in part: “I knew this family well. ... I have knelt in mighty prayer with [them]. ... Home training has carried through to the eternal blessing of this large family.” President Kimball challenged every family “to be on their knees ... praying for their sons and daughters twice daily.”¹²

Brothers and sisters, if we faithfully have family prayer, scripture study, family home evening, priesthood blessings, and Sabbath day observance, our children will know what time it is at home. They will be prepared for an eternal home in heaven, regardless of what befalls them in a difficult world. It is vitally important that our children know they are loved and safe at home.

Husbands and wives are equal partners.¹³ They have different but complementary responsibilities. The wife may bear children, which blesses the entire family. The husband may receive the priesthood, which blesses the entire family. But in family council, wives and husbands, as equal partners, make the most important decisions. They decide how the children will be taught and disciplined, how money will be spent, where they will live, and many other family decisions. These are made jointly after seeking guidance from the Lord. The goal is an eternal family.

The Light of Christ plants the eternal nature of the family in the hearts of all God’s children. One of my favorite writers, not of our faith, said it this way: “So much in life is extraneous, [but] ... the family is the real thing, the substantial thing, the eternal thing; the thing to watch over and care for and be loyal to.”¹⁴

The Church Helps Us Focus on the Savior as a United Family

In addition to the family, the role of the Church is also significant. “The Church provides the organization and means for teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to all of God’s children. It provides the priesthood authority to administer the ordinances of salvation and exaltation to all who are worthy and willing to accept them.”¹⁵

In the world there is rampant contention and iniquity and a major emphasis on divergent cultures and inequality. In the Church, except for language units, our wards and branches are geographical. We don’t divide by class or rank.¹⁶ We rejoice in the fact that all races and cultures are mixed together in a righteous congregation. Our ward family is important to our progress, happiness, and personal effort to be more Christlike.

Cultures often divide people and are sometimes a source of violence and discrimination.¹⁷ In the Book of Mormon some of the most haunting language is used to describe the traditions of wicked fathers which led to violence, war, evil deeds, iniquity, and even the destruction of peoples and nations.¹⁸

There is no better starting point in the scriptures than 4 Nephi for a description of the Church culture that is essential for all of us. In verse 2 it reads in part, “The people were all converted unto the Lord, upon all the face of the land, both Nephites and Lamanites, and there were no contentions and disputations among them, and every man did deal justly one with another.” In verse 16 we read, “And surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.” The fact that there was no contention was attributed to “the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.”¹⁹ This is the culture to which we aspire.

Deep cultural values and beliefs go to the core of who we are. Traditions of sacrifice, gratitude, faith, and righteousness are to be cherished and preserved. Families must relish and protect traditions that build faith.²⁰

One of the most significant features of any culture is its language. In the San Francisco, California, area, where I lived, there were seven nonnative language units. Our doctrine with respect to language is set forth in section 90, verse 11 of the Doctrine and Covenants: “For it shall come to pass in that day, that every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language.”

When God’s children pray to Him in their native language, that is the language of their heart. It is clear that the language of the heart is precious to all people.

My older brother, Joseph, is a medical doctor and practiced for many years in the San Francisco Bay area. An elderly Samoan Church member, who was a new patient, came to his office. He was in severe, debilitating pain. It was determined that he had a kidney stone, and appropriate treatment was undertaken. This faithful member stated that his original goal was merely to understand what was wrong so he could pray in Samoan to his Heavenly Father about his health problem.

It is important for members to understand the gospel in the language of their heart so they can pray and act in accordance with gospel principles.²¹

Even with diversity of languages and beautiful, uplifting cultural traditions, we must have hearts knit in unity and love.²² The Lord has stated emphatically: “Let every man esteem his brother as himself. ... Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine.”²³ While we treasure appropriate cultural diversities, our goal is to be united in the culture, customs, and traditions of the gospel of Jesus Christ in every respect.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Has Never Been Stronger

We recognize that some members have questions and concerns as they seek to strengthen their faith and testimonies. We should be careful not to be critical or judgmental of those with concerns—great or small. At the same time, those with concerns should do everything they can to build their own faith and testimony. Patiently and humbly studying, pondering, praying, living gospel principles, and counseling with appropriate leaders are the best ways to resolve questions or concerns.

Some have asserted that more members are leaving the Church today and that there is more doubt and unbelief than in the past. This is simply not true. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has never been stronger. The number of members removing their names from the records of the Church has always been very small and is

significantly less in recent years than in the past.²⁴ The increase in demonstrably measurable areas, such as endowed members with a current temple recommend, adult full-tithe payers, and those serving missions, has been dramatic. Let me say again, the Church has never been stronger. But, “remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God.”²⁵ We reach out to everyone.

If the grim realities you are facing at this time seem dark and heavy and almost unbearable, remember that in the soul-wrenching darkness of Gethsemane and the incomprehensible torture and pain of Calvary, the Savior accomplished the Atonement, which resolves the most terrible burdens that can occur in this life. He did it for you, and He did it for me. He did it because He loves us and because He obeys and loves His Father. We will be rescued from death—even from the depths of the sea.

Our protections in this life and for eternity will be in individual and family righteousness, Church ordinances, and following the Savior. This is our refuge from the storm. For those who feel they are alone, you can stand resolutely in righteousness knowing that the Atonement will protect and bless you beyond your ability to fully understand.

We should remember the Savior, keep our covenants, and follow the Son of God as the young sunflower follows the sunshine. Following His light and example will bring us joy, happiness, and peace. As Psalm 27 and a favorite hymn both proclaim, “The Lord is my light and my salvation.”²⁶

On this Easter weekend, as one of the Savior’s Apostles, I bear solemn witness of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. I know He lives. I know His voice. I testify of His divinity and the reality of the Atonement in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

1. See 2 Nephi 9:20–22.

2. See Mosiah 15:8–9.

3. See Philippians 4:7.

4. See Matthew 13:41.

5. Matthew 13:43.

6. See Doctrine and Covenants 115:5–6.

7. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 1.1.4.

8. Vaughn R. Kimball, "The Right Time at Home," *Reader's Digest*, May 1944, 43.

9. See letter from Captain G. A. Seitz, U.S. Navy, USS *Bunker Hill*, dated May 25, 1945, to Vaughn Kimball's father, Crozier Kimball, Draper, Utah.

10. See letter from Spencer W. Kimball, dated June 2, 1945, to Crozier Kimball; Doctrine and Covenants 42:46.

11. See Crozier Kimball, in Marva Jeanne Kimball Pedersen, *Vaughn Roberts Kimball: A Memorial* (1995), 53.

12. Spencer W. Kimball, "The Family Influence," *Ensign*, July 1973, 17. Spencer W. Kimball was then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

13. See "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.

14. Carla Carlisle, "Pray, Love, Remember," *Country Life*, Sept. 29, 2010, 120.

15. *Handbook 2*, 1.1.5.

16. See 4 Nephi 1:26.

17. Culture is much discussed in today's world. For the year 2014 the word *culture* was even named word of the year by Merriam-Webster.com.

18. See Alma 9; Helaman 5.

19. 4 Nephi 1:15.

20. The German philosopher Goethe famously wrote, “What from your fathers’ heritage is lent, earn it anew, to really possess it!” (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Bayard Taylor [1912], 1:28).

21. This is one of the reasons the Church teaches the gospel in 50 languages and translates the Book of Mormon into 110 languages. However, one of the challenges across the world is to learn the language of the country in which you live. As parents we need to sacrifice to help the rising generation learn the language of the country where they now live. Help them make that language the language of their heart.

22. See Mosiah 18:21.

23. Doctrine and Covenants 38:25, 27.

24. Over the last 25 years, the actual number of members leaving the Church has decreased and the Church has almost doubled in size. The percentage leaving is greatly reduced.

25. Doctrine and Covenants 18:10.

26. Psalm 27:1; see also “The Lord Is My Light,” *Hymns*, no. 89.